

OCTAVIAN AND EGYPTIAN CULTS: REDRAWING THE BOUNDARIES OF ROMANNESS

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Abstract. Octavian's decision in 28 B.C.E. to ban Egyptian cults from within the *pomerium* was not a sign of hostility to foreign cults, especially since the emperor himself arranged for the restoration of those shrines outside the city's religious boundary. Rather, his action served to reassert the Roman openness to foreign religions while at the same time underlining the distinctions between Roman and foreign religious practices. Using the *pomerium* to demarcate a clear boundary between Roman and non-Roman helped to reconstruct the sense of Roman identity that had been shattered by the civil wars of the previous fifty years.

IN 28 B.C.E., THE YEAR IN WHICH OCTAVIAN BEGAN RESTORING the famous eighty-two temples mentioned in his *Res Gestae*, Dio Cassius reports that he took two further actions regarding religious activity in the city of Rome (53.2.4):

He did not admit Egyptian rites inside the *pomerium*, but made provisions for the shrines; those which had been built by private individuals he ordered their sons and descendants, if any survived, to repair, and the rest he restored himself.

καὶ τὰ μὲν ἱερά τὰ Αἰγύπτια οὐκ ἔσεδέξατο εἶσω τοῦ πωμηρίου, τῶν δὲ δὴ ναῶν πρόνοιαν ἐποιήσατο· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ὑπ' ἰδιωτῶν τινων γεγενήμενους τοῖς τε παῖσιν αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐγγόνιοις, ἔγχε τινὲς περιήσαν, ἐπισκευάσαι ἐκέλευσε, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς αὐτὸς ἀνεκτίησατο.¹

This latter action, which has been mostly overlooked in discussions of Augustan religious activity, presents a challenge to those who have seen the emperor as hostile to foreign religions and to Egyptian religion in

¹All translations are my own, and all dates are B.C.E. unless otherwise noted. For convenience, I refer to the first Roman emperor as Octavian throughout this article, since my concern is primarily with events prior to 27 when he assumed the name Augustus.

particular.² Even when modern scholars have highlighted innovations made by Octavian as part of his “restoration” of traditional Roman religious practices, they have often accepted the heuristic model of an emphasis on ancestral Roman custom at the expense and even exclusion of foreign traditions.³ This emphasis might be consistent with a series of Senatorial decrees passed against the worship of Egyptian deities during the Late Republic, but it runs counter to Republican tradition, for the Romans were notoriously open to foreign religious influences throughout the Republic.⁴ Octavian’s action was therefore in keeping with general Republican precedent and more lenient specifically towards Egyptian cults than his Republican predecessors. While the emperor’s actions may seem surprising at first sight, considering the conclusion of the recent war against Antony and the assimilation of Cleopatra to Isis during the triumviral period, his behavior toward Egyptian religion in fact served to underline the distinctions between Roman and foreign religious practices and in so doing to aid in reconstructing the sense of Roman identity that had been shattered by the civil wars of the previous fifty years.

The case for Octavian’s hostility to Egyptian religion has been based on passages written by authors living well after the age of the first emperor. Perhaps the most important of these comes from Suetonius’ *Life of Augustus* (93):

Of the foreign religious ceremonies, he worshipped most reverently those that were old and accepted, but others he held in contempt. For having been initiated at Athens, when he later was hearing a case in the courts

²Cf., e.g., Becher 1988, 149, who mentions the first part of the emperor’s decree but ignores completely the second part, as part of her argument that “there was no place for the gods Isis and Sarapis in the Augustan Peace.”

³See Lambrechts 1947; Wardman 1982, 63–79, 113–14; Rich 1990, 134. Versluys 2004, 446, is a notable exception, suggesting that “the Egyptian gods were thought to play their part in the imperial system as a public cult,” though he does not specify the nature of that part. Galinsky 1996, 288–312, and Scheid 2005 both offer judicious comments on the theme of tradition and innovation, though Galinsky (190) does suggest that Octavian and Agrippa tried to “limit the cult of Isis.” Beard, North, and Price 1998, 167–68, discuss the importance to Octavian of representing his program as a restoration; although they suggest (228) that Octavian did concern himself with “patrolling the unacceptable,” they note the fluidity of the category of “foreign.”

⁴On innovation and accommodation as a feature of Roman religion, see Beard, North, and Price 1998, 61–72, 79–84, and *passim*. Although some scholars, including Beard, North, and Price, have suggested that the Second Punic War brought a new attitude that was less adventurous than before, innovation and the incorporation of foreign elements continued into the Late Republic and beyond.

concerning the privileges of the priests of the Attic Ceres and certain elements of the mysteries were being put forward, he heard the disputants alone, having dismissed the other members of the court as the throng of bystanders. But on the other hand, he not only refrained while visiting Egypt from changing his path a little in order to visit Apis, but he also praised his grandson Gaius for not offering prayers at Jerusalem during his passage through Judaea.

Peregrinarum caerimoniarum sicut veteres ac praeceptas reverentissime coluit, ita ceteras contemptui habuit. Namque Athenis initiatus, cum postea Romae pro tribunali de privilegio sacerdotum Atticae Cereris cognosceret et quaedam secretiora proponerentur, dimisso consilio et corona circumstantium solus audiit disceptantes. At contra non modo in peragranda Aegypto paulo deflectere ad visendum Apin supersedit, sed et Gaium nepotem, quod Iudaeam praetervehens apud Hierosolyma non supplicasset, conlaudavit.

Suetonius does single out the Egyptian cult here as one that the emperor did not respect, but the conclusion that this action represents a generalized contempt for Egyptian religion as a whole cannot be sustained. The same passage indicates the emperor's praise for his grandson who did not stop to worship at Jerusalem, and yet Barclay (1996, 292–98) has demonstrated that the *princeps* held no overall animus towards the Jews. Suetonius' point here is merely to provide examples of religious traditions that Octavian himself observed: the emperor clearly was not an observer of the Jewish faith nor of Egyptian rites, in contrast to the way he had been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, the example with which Suetonius begins. As so often with Suetonius, his use of rubrics to organize his material has distorted the significance of the individual facts that he has preserved for us.

Furthermore, Suetonius' explanation, that the emperor respected ancient and established traditions, reveals the emperor's success in presenting himself as a champion of traditional religious ceremonies but cannot be accepted as the reason for Octavian's decision not to visit Apis. To begin with, it is difficult to see how the Eleusinian mysteries could have been considered older or more established than Egyptian or Jewish ceremonies; both civilizations, though often viewed askance by the Romans, were nonetheless respected for their antiquity. The lack of context for the emperor's decision allows Suetonius to attach his own meaning to this event, but fortunately for us Dio preserves additional details concerning this incident. Following the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, Dio (51.15–16) describes the dispositions of Augustus

regarding their followers: the deaths of Antyllus and Caesarion, the marriage arranged for Cleopatra Selene, and the punishment or pardon for individual partisans. Dio continues:

In the case of the Egyptians and the Alexandrians, he spared them all, so that none perished . . . He offered as a pretext for his kindness their god Sarapis, their founder Alexander, and, in the third place, their fellow-citizen Areius . . . After this he viewed the body of Alexander and actually touched it, whereupon, it is said, a piece of the nose was broken off. But he declined to view the remains of the Ptolemies, though the Alexandrians were extremely eager to show them, remarking, "I wished to see a king, not corpses." For this same reason he would not enter the presence of Apis, either, declaring that he was accustomed to worship gods, not cattle.

Several points pertaining to our discussion of the emperor's attitude towards Egypt and Egyptian religion may be derived from this account. Octavian's actions seem designed to underline what he considered to be appropriate objects of reverence for a Roman: Alexander as the Greek conqueror of the world, but not the Ptolemaic rulers, who in the Egyptian system were incarnations of the divine but whose very divinity Octavian ostentatiously rejected. Similarly, zoomorphic divinities were rejected in favor of the traditional Roman anthropomorphic conception. The worship of animal-headed gods was anathema to Romans both before and after Octavian, and Dio explicitly relates the emperor's decision not to visit Apis to this aversion.⁵ But Octavian's decision not to visit Apis therefore cannot be used as evidence of a generalized bias held by the emperor against Egyptian religion. Indeed, in this same passage Dio reports that Octavian publicly announced that he was sparing the lives of all Alexandrians out of respect for their god Sarapis. Dio clearly labels this claim a "pretext," and certainly it may have been a shrewd public relations move by Octavian to win over the sympathies of the Alexandrian populace, but it is nonetheless revealing that the victor at Actium chose to honor an Egyptian divinity, albeit a Hellenized one, as a pretext. Other pretexts and other means of gaining popular support in Egypt were available; there was no need to cite Sarapis as the reason for pardoning Egypt. Offering

⁵For indications of the Roman dislike of animal-headed divinities, see Cicero, *Nat. D.* 1.36 and 3.16; *Tusc.* 5.27; Vergil *Aen.* 8.698; Lucan 8.832; Juvenal 15.1–13. Vergil's language (*monstra et latrator Anubis*) centers his opposition to Egyptian gods on the form of the god in just the same way as Octavian's expression of dislike for Apis. See further Malaise 1972, 248. On the general Roman aversion to Egyptian animal-headed deities, see Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984.

respect to one Egyptian divinity, and a comparatively young god in the Egyptian pantheon, while simultaneously turning away from another reveals that Octavian drew a deliberate distinction between these gods, not that he held Egyptian rites in contempt.

We shall return later to the grounds on which Octavian might have drawn this distinction.

The incident related by Dio Cassius with which I began this article has also been used to support the notion of the emperor's hostility to Egyptian rites, but while it does relate more clearly to the emperor's overall attitude, close examination reveals that this incident actually demonstrates the emperor's support for the Egyptian cults. As noted above, in 28, Octavian banned the performance of Egyptian rites from inside the *pomerium*, the religious boundary of the city of Rome, and seven years later, Agrippa extended this ban to reach one mile beyond the *pomerium* (Dio Cass. 54.6). Most discussions of this episode have seen this action as a continuation of the Senatorial repression of Egyptian cults in the wake of the victory at Actium; Malaise (1972, 380) even expresses surprise that the emperor's action was not more drastic.⁶ The explanation of Malaise and others has been that the cult's appeal to the lower classes was too strong for an outright ban, but the emperor aimed to maintain order in the city by banishing Egyptian cults to the outskirts of the city. But this explanation seems unlikely.⁷ While Agrippa's action in 21 is indeed described by Dio in the context of rioting in the city, those riots revolved around the consular elections, and it is unclear how a ban on Egyptian rites might calm those disturbances. In fact it did not have that effect, for in the very next sentence Dio relates that a commotion arose concerning the election of the urban prefect and that Agrippa was forced to go through the year without this magistrate. So Agrippa's action appears not to have been related to the unrest, just as Octavian's action of 28 almost certainly was not. Since the *pomerium* was not coterminous with the city walls, a ban on the celebration of Egyptian rites inside the *pomerium* did not ban Egyptian rites within the city, or even in the plebeian districts of the city, for the Aventine, long a plebeian stronghold, lay outside the *pomerium*. The emperor's support for rebuilding the temples of Isis and Sarapis in Rome militates even more strongly against viewing this action as a strike against Egyptian rites or part of a generalized program of hostility toward Egyptian religion. At the same time as he prohibited Egyptian

⁶See also Ciceroni 1992, 106; Grimm 1997, 124; Arena 2001, 304–5.

⁷Cf. Kienast 1999, 196, who discusses the action of Agrippa only briefly in the context of Octavian's relations to the lower classes and his attempt to control the *collegia*.

rites within the *pomerium*, Augustus made provisions for their shrines; Dio (53.2.4) reports that “those which had been built by private individuals he ordered their sons and descendants, if any survived, to repair, and the rest he restored himself.” That Augustus himself restored some of these shrines is a striking indication of support that should not be overlooked or argued away.⁸ So long as worship of Isis and Sarapis was restricted to certain locations, Octavian not only passively allowed worship of these divinities, he also took positive action to support them.

Even more striking, Octavian’s action in providing for the rebuilding of temples to Isis and Sarapis, while in keeping with the general Roman acceptance of foreign cults, broke with the Republican precedents that dealt specifically with Egyptian cults. Foreign cults such as Castor and Pollux, Ceres and Apollo had been welcomed in Rome as early as the fifth century, and the Romans also showed themselves willing to use foreign religious practices, as when they consulted the Delphic oracle for advice or more spectacularly utilized the Etruscan haruspices on a regular basis. Isis herself is attested by inscriptional evidence in Campania in the second century B.C.E. and in Rome by the first century, where a funeral inscription naming thirteen Roman citizens includes a priest of Isis and his wife.⁹ However in the middle of the first century, Egyptian deities faced sharp repression by a series of Senatorial actions. In 58, according to Varro (as reported by Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 1.10), Sarapis, Isis, Harpocrates, and Anubis were prohibited from the Capitol and their altars destroyed. Although this incident marks the first known action against Egyptian cults, it also provides the strongest confirmation of the favorable reception of these deities through the 60s: the fact that altars to these four Egyptian gods were standing on the Capitol, the religious heart of

⁸Malaise 1972, 380–81, found Octavian’s participation in the rebuilding of Egyptian shrines to be so incredible that he interpreted the text of Dio to mean that the shrines in question were not those of the Egyptians but a reference to the broader Augustan program of temple restoration. Yet the text strongly implies that these were the Egyptian shrines, and Malaise’s rejection of the most natural reading is based on his conception of Augustan hostility to Egyptian cults rather than on any other evidence.

⁹An inscription from Puteoli dated to 105 provides the earliest epigraphical evidence for the cult of Isis in Italy; cf. *CIL* X.1781 (= *ILLRP* 518); see also *ILS* 4423. Worship of Isis in Rome is attested by *ILS* 4405; Coarelli 1984, 464, prefers a date between 90 and 60 for this inscription, based on onomastic considerations as well as stylistic evidence. Degraasi (*ILLRP* 159) suggested 58 for a date, while Malaise 1972, 184–87, suggested a date as late as 48. On the names and the families involved on this inscription, see Takacs 1995, 51–56. Numismatic evidence also indicates the reception of Isis into the mainstream, for Isiac symbols appear as control marks on a number of coins dating back to ca. 90; cf. Alföldi 1954, 25–31, and Takacs 1995, 34–51.

the city, confirms their acceptance and worship in Rome, and Tertullian's account notes that the altars torn down by the Senate had been restored through popular force. Five years later in 53, according to a note in Dio (40.47), the Senate decreed that shrines to Isis and Sarapis, which had been put up at private expense, should be torn down, and Dio further reports (42.26.1) that in 48, soothsayers interpreted an omen involving a statue of Hercules as indicating that all precincts to Isis should be completely dug up, since Isis was worshiped in the vicinity of the statue.¹⁰

Our sources provide no hints for the motivations of these actions, but there is no sign in our sources that the Senate's concern lay with the presence of Egyptian cults within the line of the *pomerium*. It would not be at all surprising if one or more of these actions were connected to the intense political maneuverings of the Late Republic or to the controversy that surrounded the restoration of Ptolemy Auletes in 58. Gabinius' action appears to be an attempt to reassert the Senatorial privilege to decide on matters of religion, and the account relayed by Tertullian, indicating that the shrines had been rebuilt once by popular force, lends credence to the notion that Egyptian cults were popular with the *plebs* and thus that the Senate might have wanted to reassert its authority.¹¹ Such an attitude would be consistent with earlier Republican behavior. But perhaps the most striking feature about the Late Republican Senatorial actions is the progression of increasing severity against the Egyptian cults, from a ban on one location, to the destruction of all temples, to the destruction of the precincts in which those temples had been located.¹² We should not be misled into believing that the Senate's actions were effective in eradicating the cult from the Roman landscape by 48, as subsequent incidents reveal.¹³ However, these actions of the 50s and 40s demonstrate

¹⁰Dio Cass. 40.47.3 (53 B.C.E.): τοὺς γὰρ αὐτῶν, οὓς ἰδίᾳ τινὲς ἐπεποιήντο, καθελεῖν τῇ βουλῇ ἔδοξεν. Dio Cass. 42.26.2 (48 B.C.E.): ἔδοξε γνώμη τῶν μάντεων πάντα αὐθις τὰ τε ἐκείνης καὶ τὰ τοῦ Σαράπιδος τεμενίσματα κατασκάψαι.

¹¹Takacs 1995, 65–66, offers this as an “extremely plausible reason for the senatorial decree” despite the lack of evidence. Hayne 1992, 143–49, suggests rather implausibly that a connection between Pompey and Isis explains the various Senatorial actions throughout the 50s and 40s. See also Cicero 1992, 106; Arena 2001, 302–3.

¹²It is unclear exactly in reference to the action of 48 exactly what Dio means by *temenismata kataskapsai* (see n. 8 above); this term may translate the Roman *exauguratio*, a formal Roman ceremony for transforming a religious locale back into a secular one. If so, this action would be an even more severe strike against the cults of Isis and Sarapis, representing an attempt to eradicate these cults entirely rather than just attacking the particular installations at the site.

¹³Valerius Maximus (7.3.8) tells the story of the proscribed aedile M. Volusius who escaped from Rome in 43 dressed as a priest of Isis; if the cult had been effectively

that the Senate had set the public face of Rome against even the slightest presence of Egyptian deities in Rome, even prior to the conflict with Antony and Cleopatra.

Octavian's acceptance of the cult of Isis at Rome thus ran contrary to earlier Senatorial actions in regard to Egyptian cults, and this comparative leniency toward Egyptian religious practice is all the more surprising because it runs counter to the propaganda campaign of the triumviral period. As is well known, in the public relations war waged before the climactic battle at Actium, Octavian repeatedly emphasized the contrast between Italy and Egypt, depicting himself as the defender of the Roman way of life.¹⁴ The infamous production of Antony's will, in which the Roman general was said to have expressed the wish to be buried at Alexandria, helped turn the tide of public sentiment, and Octavian ultimately made a point of declaring war only against Cleopatra and of invoking the *ius fetiale* to emphasize that this was not a civil war but a war against a hostile foreign aggressor.¹⁵ Religion served as an important aspect of Octavian's campaign; the representation of Cleopatra as Isis, a representation that Cleopatra fostered in Egypt for its positive connotations in that country, allowed Octavian an easy means of bolstering his case.¹⁶ Dio (50.25) presents Octavian explicitly using the connection to Isis against his opponents in his speech encouraging his men to fight for their native Italy on the eve of the battle of Actium. Paul Zanker (1988, 57–64) has shown how the propaganda war extended to visual imagery as well, where Antony could be shown as representative of the exotic East. The hostile representations of Egypt continued after the war, especially in the poetry of Horace (*Ep.* 9 and *Carm.* 1.37), Vergil (especially *Aeneid*

eradicated by this time, such apparel would have called additional attention to Volusius rather than serving as an effective disguise. The story is also told, with minor variations, by Appian, *B.Civ.* 4.47. Coarelli 1982, 60–61, doubts the efficacy of these measures, suggesting that inscriptional evidence attesting the existence of priests to Capitoline Isis in the middle of the first century and towards the end of the first century C.E. indicates the continuation of the cult throughout, though “with some interruption.” That acknowledged interruption lies at the heart of the present investigation; since the *communis opinio* is that worship of Isis was officially recognized in Rome by Caligula, evidence of the cult after that time should not occasion surprise. Curiously, Coarelli mentions only in passing (64) the actions of Octavian and Agrippa in the 20s, (mis)labeling them as “expulsion measures.”

¹⁴On the propaganda war of the late 30s, see Pelling 1996, 36–54; Reinhold 1988, 222–23.

¹⁵Dio Cass. 50.4.4–5; cf. Plut. *Ant.* 60.

¹⁶On the religious component to the war, see Becher 1965, 42–43; cf. Dio Cass. 50.5.3; Plut. *Ant.* 54. For discussion of Cleopatra as Isis, see Wyke 1992, 100–105.

8.685–713), and Propertius (3.11 and 4.6). Of particular interest is Vergil's portrayal of the battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas, where Egyptian gods are presented as battling against the proper Roman divinities Neptune, Venus, and Minerva. Octavian's decision to support the worship of two Egyptian deities runs counter to the images propagated through this propaganda and needs explanation.

One avenue of approach is to note that Octavian was not implacably opposed to Egyptian culture in all its forms. Much of the anti-Egyptian display on the part of Octavian during the triumviral period seems to have been generated by the conflict against Antony and Cleopatra rather than by deeply felt bias against Egyptian culture. The strongest evidence for this suggestion comes from Octavian's own house on the Palatine hill, constructed most probably in the late 30s and early 20s, that is, at the very time when anti-Egyptian propaganda was reaching its peak, and perhaps continuing through the year 28 when the ban on Egyptian cults within the *pomerium* was first promulgated. The wall decorations of one of the *cubicula* in Octavian's house, as well as a *cubiculum* in Livia's adjacent house, included such Egyptian elements as obelisks, lotus flowers, *uraei*, and *situlae*.¹⁷ Wall decorations from the villa della Farnesina, perhaps the house of Agrippa and Julia, now in the Palazzo Massimo in Rome, reveal similar Egyptian themes in several rooms.¹⁸ The so-called Aula Isiaca on the Palatine hill, which likely dates to this period, provides another example of Egyptian decoration in a domestic context, though the connection of this structure to Augustus remains controversial.¹⁹ Egyptian imagery is even present in the temple of Apollo that Octavian constructed on the Palatine hill in honor of the god who helped him to victory at Actium, for one of the most visible elements of the temple's pictorial program was the so-called Portico of the Danaids in which the fifty daughters of Danaus were depicted killing their Egyptian husbands. While the interpretation of this monument is the subject of debate, it seems unlikely that the message conveyed here was of simple anti-Egyptian triumphalism.²⁰ Furthermore,

¹⁷ Carettoni 1983, esp. 67–85.

¹⁸ Museo Nazionale Romano 1982.

¹⁹ On the Aula Isiaca, see most recently Iacopi 1997, who suggests a date in the 20s but eschews a connection to the house of Augustus. On the range of Egyptian motifs found on the Palatine, see Kleiner 2005, 170–78.

²⁰ Suggestions have ranged from a reminder of the victory over Egypt to an evocation of the horrors of civil war; on the significance of the Danaid monument, see Lefèvre 1989; Zanker 1983 and Simon 1986, 20–24. For a recent attempt at reconstructing the monument, see Quenemoen 2006.

Isis herself appears flanked by sphinxes on the Campana plaques of the temple of Apollo, apparently without negative connotations.²¹ Egyptian motifs are also present on other public monuments erected by Octavian; a marble cornice fragment from the ceiling of his Mausoleum depicts an *atef* crown, and several scholars have discussed the obelisks re-erected by Octavian in Rome, including one that served as the *gnomon* for his *horologium*.²² These features indicate that Octavian was willing to use Egyptian culture when it suited his purposes. While public policy pronouncements of the 30s and literature of the 20s may display antipathy toward Egypt and Egyptian culture, artistic decorations, especially those sponsored by Octavian and his immediate family, reveal a greater level of acceptance of Egyptian elements.

These facts may be sufficient to explode the notion that Octavian was opposed to Egyptian culture, but they do not directly address the issue of his actions relating to Egyptian religion where more than aesthetic decorative schemes are involved. Although the shrines ordered to be rebuilt in 28 were apparently not part of the state religion, the public support for Egyptian rites is more surprising than Octavian's use of decorative motifs. Fifteen years earlier, the triumvirs had, according to Dio (47.16), decided to build a temple to Isis in Rome, but there is no evidence that this temple was ever built.²³ The failure to do so is likely the result of the ensuing hostilities with Antony and the broader propaganda campaign directed against Cleopatra-Isis. But in the aftermath of the war, Octavian continued to parade himself as a dedicated restorer of Roman religion, including such ostentatious actions as waiting for the

²¹ See Strazzulla 1990, 81–84, and Fig. 31. Strazzulla suggests that the hostility of Octavian to Egyptian cults has been overstated, noting the subsequent erection in year 10 of two obelisks. Kellum 1985, 171, argued that Isis appeared as a type of victory trophy, with the goddess effectively “pinioned between a pair of sphinxes,” though Strazzulla, 84, n. 163, dismisses this argument as “unacceptable.” To my eye, the Isis figure has both hands free and does not appear to be hindered by the sphinxes in any way.

²² Mausoleum fragment: de Vos 1980, 74, and frontispiece. On obelisks, see Strabo 17.805; Pliny, *HN* 36.71; Iverson 1968.

²³ Coarelli 1982, 64, followed by Kleiner 2005, 167, suggests that the temple vowed in 43 was that of Isis Campensis, though there is no evidence connecting the triumvirs to that temple, and a date in the 40s seems too early for the temple in the Campus Martius; Lembke 1994, 65–67, places it between 20 and 10. Given the location of that temple outside the *pomerium*, its significance, if indeed it was constructed in Octavian's lifetime, would be limited to a further demonstration that the emperor was not implacably opposed to the goddess. If Lembke is correct on the dating, it might even have been constructed in response to the decrees of Octavian and Agrippa under discussion here.

death of Lepidus before assuming the role of *pontifex maximus*. This posture makes his apparent reversal of policy, in the form of his support for rebuilding shrines to Isis in 28, all the more in need of explanation. One would not expect to see Octavian, a mere three years after the battle of Actium, take a public position toward Egyptian rites, and toward Isis in particular, that was more tolerant than the Republican Senate, even to the point of helping to rebuild temples that his predecessors had been at pains to destroy. The Augustan “restoration program” began in earnest in the same year, 28, when Octavian built the temple of Apollo on the Palatine and announced the rebuilding of the eighty-two temples mentioned in the *Res Gestae*. The juxtaposition of these actions and the early date, even before the political “settlement” of 27, calls further attention to the rebuilding of temples to the Egyptian deities and encourages us to consider the emperor’s purposes in the context of this broader series of actions. Just as the emperor showed himself willing to utilize Egyptian decorative elements when it suited his purposes, the reconstruction of temples to Egyptian deities combined with the ban on Egyptian rites within the *pomerium* must have been conducive to Octavian’s aims at this moment, and our task is to uncover those aims.

I suggest the clue to this activity lies in Octavian’s use of the *pomerium*, for there is no precedent for the formal ban on foreign religious practices from within its confines. According to Roman tradition, the *pomerium* was a furrow plowed by Romulus as part of the original foundation of the city, and the walls of the city were built just inside this furrow; Varro (*Ling.* 5.43) provides an etymology of *pomerium* from *post murum*. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.24), the line of the *pomerium* ran originally from the Forum Boarium to include the Palatine and the Roman Forum, with the Esquiline, Capitoline, and Quirinal hills apparently enclosed by the end of the regal period. As a boundary, the *pomerium* was significant in several different aspects of Roman life. To mention only a few, civic auspices could be taken properly only within its boundary; the *imperium* of military commanders—an authority, it should be noted, grounded in religion—lapsed when they crossed the *pomerium*; and burials were not permitted within the *pomerium*.²⁴ More importantly for our purposes, I have demonstrated elsewhere (Orlin 2002) that, although many scholars have assumed the existence of a rule that banned cults of foreign origin from within the line of the *pomerium*, no such rule actually existed. Several clearly foreign cults, including Castor and Pollux, Venus Erycina, and the

²⁴ On the *pomerium*, see Andreussi 1999. Cf. also Andreussi 1988; Liou-Gille 1993.

Magna Mater, had temples within the *pomerium*, and Vitruvius, the only ancient author to discuss the placement of temples, never once mentions the *pomerium* in his discussion (*De. Arch.* 1.7.1).²⁵ In fact, the first unambiguous instance of the exclusion of foreign cults from the *pomerium* is the case under consideration here: Octavian's ban on Egyptian rites in 28. Octavian's action thus represents an innovation, the invention of a new tradition to serve a new purpose.²⁶

To understand the significance of Octavian's action in regard to the *pomerium*, a real if invisible boundary, we need to consider the significance of boundaries from a symbolic point of view. The role of boundaries in the construction and maintenance of social groups and for fostering a sense of group identity has become the focus of numerous studies, following the observation of Fredrik Barth (1969, 14–15) that the continuity of ethnic group identity depends on maintaining a clear sense of the boundaries between one group and another rather than on maintaining any one particular element as indicative of group identity: "The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses." The notion of focusing on the boundaries that separate groups rather than on the supposed defining characteristics of each group has been applied to the ancient world recently by several scholars, who have thus been able to offer new observations on issues of ethnicity and identity among peoples of the ancient Mediterranean basin.²⁷

²⁵ A parenthetical comment in Beard, North, and Price 1998, 180, offers some recognition that Octavian's ban on the Egyptian rites within the *pomerium* might be "inventing" a principle, and the associated footnote (n. 44) similarly distances themselves from supporting the notion that such a principle existed during the Republic.

²⁶ On "invented traditions" as a means of creating a sense of identity, see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983. From their introduction (4): "we should expect it [the invention of tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed." They also (6) remark on "the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes." Indeed, Octavian seems to fit closely the model proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger, and a study of the various ways in which Octavian invented such traditions would be quite fruitful.

²⁷ As an example from the ancient world, Cohen 1999, 39–49, has shown how circumcision, ostensibly the "marker" of Judaism, did not always function effectively as a marker to define who was a Jew for a variety of reasons, not least that other groups practiced this custom as well. Cohen (198–238) goes on to suggest that the problem of maintaining a clear Jewish identity in the period after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. led the rabbis to create a new conversion ritual as a means of clearly separating Jews from non-Jews. See also the work of Hall 1997 and 2002, and the collection edited by Malkin 2001.

In regard to Roman society, the concept of boundaries proves similarly fruitful, especially because the success and stability of the Roman state was in large part predicated on the integration of defeated peoples rather than their simple subjugation or destruction. The incorporation of foreign elements was a long-standing tradition in Rome, and many typically “Roman” practices actually had their origins outside of Rome and sometimes outside of Italy: the *sella curulis*, *fasces*, haruspicy, and other practices derived from Etruria, and numerous religious cults and festivals arrived from various Italian cities, Sicily, Greece, and even Asia Minor. Focusing on the question of boundaries allows us to avoid engaging in a fruitless hunt for “purely Roman” characteristics but instead to consider how the Romans were able to reestablish clear boundaries of Romanness, and thus maintain a clear sense of Roman identity, while simultaneously incorporating these ostensibly foreign elements. The presence of elements within the Roman religious system that we now recognize as originally Greek need not present a problem for Roman identity; it matters less whether the Romans worshiped Jupiter or Aesculapius (or both), so long as they found a way to maintain a clear distinction between Greek and Roman.²⁸ The cult of the *Magna Mater* provides an excellent example of how the Romans accomplished both aims: Mary Beard (1994) has discussed how the restrictions on the cult noted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19), such as prohibiting Romans serving as priests for the *Magna Mater*, marked off certain practices related to this cult as “non-Roman,” even as the goddess was welcomed as an important part of the Roman state religion. The boundaries of Romanness could thus be maintained even while a new and foreign cult was added to the state pantheon.

Octavian’s action in encouraging the worship of Egyptian deities outside the *pomerium* should be understood in this light: the significance of his action lies in the need for clear boundaries in order to establish and maintain group identity. The civil wars and Octavian’s eventual victory over Antony and Cleopatra had marked the end of the traditional conception of Roman identity, a conception that had been gradually eroded since the Social War and even beyond, which needed to be reconstructed. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (2000, 295) put it, “the late republic is marked by a collapse of the ability to define physically what being Roman consists in, and the reign of Augustus marks a new coherence of

²⁸For an example of how the Romans created a distinction between Greek and Roman during the second century B.C.E., a period of increased contact with Greek culture that presented a significant challenge for Roman identity, see Scheid 1995.

definition.” Roman religion was of course not immune to the pressures of the Late Republic, and the problem of definition was compounded by the fact that the state religious system had long been the site for the incorporation of foreign elements and foreign traditions, as discussed above. Studies of ethnic identity have remarked on the importance of religion in the process of group self-renewal, and Anthony Smith (1986, 119–25) has suggested that a key component to renewing group self-identity is allowing for religious reform, and even the incorporation of ostensibly foreign elements, while still maintaining well-defined boundaries.²⁹ The entire series of religious actions undertaken by the first emperor, which modern scholars call collectively the Augustan religious reform program, should be seen in this light and as part of a process that restored a clear sense of Roman identity in the wake of the trauma caused by fifty years of civil war.

Octavian’s activity in regard to Isis and Sarapis might best be understood as part of this process. By encouraging the worship of Egyptian deities and using the *pomerium* to differentiate them from Roman cults in 28, the *princeps* marked Egyptian rites as non-Roman in much the same way as restrictions on the Magna Mater marked her rites as non-Roman. This action in defining Egyptian rites as non-Roman finds parallels in Roman literature, as discussed by Maria Wyke (1992, 100–105): Vergil’s description of the battle of Actium opposes the dog-headed non-Roman Anubis to the Roman Neptune, Venus, and Minerva, while Horace and Propertius use their poetic descriptions of Cleopatra herself to figure her as distinctively non-Roman. Similarly, Octavian had been careful to mark the military struggle as a war against Egypt rather than a civil war between rival Roman factions. Yet by making provisions for the restoration of temples to Isis and Sarapis, Octavian publicly demonstrated that the Roman state was still hospitable to foreigners. Despite the propaganda campaign of the previous decade, the war had been waged against Cleopatra alone, a political and military rival, and not against Egyptian culture or religion more broadly. While the Romans had an uneasy relationship with Egypt even prior to the emergence of Cleopatra as a threat to Rome, Octavian had now conquered Egypt, and the decision to encourage the worship of Isis might be read as an attempt at incorporating Egypt within the Roman sphere, just as with the incorporation of foreign deities earlier in the Republic. The involvement of Isis here is particularly noteworthy. As noted earlier, the propaganda

²⁹For other comments on the relation between religion and ethnic identity, see, e.g., Armstrong 1982, 201–40; Hastings, 1997.

prior to the battle of Actium linked Cleopatra closely with Isis, while Octavian chose to portray himself not just as the defender of Italy but, particularly, as the defender of Roman gods and goddesses. Three years after the battle, Octavian actually encouraged the worship of Isis but on Roman terms: only outside the *pomerium*. Octavian thus achieved a double aim: accepting Egypt with the sphere of the Roman empire but also demarcating the boundary between Roman and non-Roman to recreate a clear sense of Roman identity.

The contemporaneous treatment of another cult hailing from the East, Apollo, can help us further understand Octavian's concern with the boundaries between Roman and non-Roman as well as suggesting the contours of that boundary. A lengthy exposition of the emperor's relationship with Apollo is not necessary, for Octavian's predilection for the god is well known and has been demonstrated in many spheres.³⁰ But several aspects of the *princeps'* behavior in regard to Apollo deserve to be emphasized. Apollo had originally arrived in Rome as a god of healing; Livy (4.25–29) indicates that his initial temple in Rome, and his only temple until the time of Octavian, had been built in response to a plague and further notes (40.51) that in 179 this cult of Apollo was still known as Apollo Medicus. While some cults of Apollo in Greece maintained a healing focus, cults of Aesculapius became more prominent as the primary healing god during the later Classical and Hellenistic ages. As Walter Burkert (1985, 143–49) has discussed, Apollo was more frequently connected with prophecy, as at Delphi, or with poetry and song. When Octavian built a new temple to Apollo in Rome, he emphasized precisely these “Greek” aspects of the god. As one sign of this changed approach, he moved the Sibylline Books out of their traditional home in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter and placed them inside his new temple to Apollo; Rome's most prominent oracular pronouncements were henceforward to be under the care of Apollo, just as the most prominent oracle in the Greek world was located at a sanctuary to Apollo. Octavian also made Apollo the overseer of his new saeculum, converting the *ludi Saeculares*, celebrated in 17, to honor Apollo and Diana rather than Dis and Proserpina who had been the primary recipients during previous celebrations.³¹

³⁰ See Kienast 1999, esp. 230–39, with further bibliography at n. 90. Cf. Zanker 1988, 48–53, and *passim* on Apollo in Augustan artistic work; Galinsky 1996, 213–24; Beard, North, and Price 1998, 198–99.

³¹ On the shift in focus of the Secular Games, see Beard, North, and Price 1998, 202–3; Zanker 1988, 168–72. A fragment of Varro (preserved in Censorinus, *DN* 17.8) mentions Dis and Proserpina as the deities of the original Secular Games, while the *carmen saeculare*

As Paul Zanker (1988, 53) summarizes, “after the victory [at Actium] was won, then Apollo took on his role as singer, lyre player, and god of peace and reconciliation. And as the prophetic god, with sibyl and sphinx, it was he who proclaimed the long-awaited new age.” Yet it is important to note that this image of Apollo promulgated by Octavian owes more to Greek than to Roman precedents.

The significance of this fact becomes apparent when one considers both the date and the location of the new temple built by Octavian to honor Apollo. Octavian had originally vowed this temple to Apollo in 36 in the course of his campaigns against Sextus Pompeius and also credited Apollo with playing the critical role at the battle of Actium, even building a temple to Apollo at Nikopolis, his new city founded on the mainland near Actium. The temple in Rome, the first to Apollo in Rome since the fifth century, was dedicated in 28, the same year in which the Egyptian rites were banned from the *pomerium*, and it was located on the Palatine hill, i.e., *inside* the *pomerium*. Zanker (1988, 49–51, 66–69) has pointed out the close physical connection between this new temple to Apollo and Octavian’s residence on the Palatine, and certainly one explanation for this location may be Octavian’s desire to closely associate himself and his reign with Apollo. But Octavian was keenly attuned to Roman religious niceties, as attested by the way he made a part of his house on the Palatine public property to hold a shrine to Vesta so that as *pontifex maximus* he could continue to reside on the Palatine.³² The decision to locate the temple of Apollo inside the *pomerium* may thus be seen as significant: Apollo was placed inside the same boundary from which the Egyptian rites were excluded. This action demonstrates clearly that the exclusion of Egyptian rites from the *pomerium* was not a ban on cults of foreign origin, but an expression of their status as “non-Roman” cults. In this regard, it is significant that Augustus did not include Isis and Sarapis on the Roman festival calendar; though the cults were accepted in Rome, they were not made “Roman.” At the same time, the placement of Apollo’s temple within the *pomerium* suggests that the Greek cult, Apollo, was to be considered Roman. The action may have been symbolic, but the implications are clear: in reshaping the boundaries of

of Horace reveals clearly the emphasis on Apollo and Diana, who are mentioned by name four and three times respectively. The inscription (*CIL* 6.32323) that records the three days of rites performed during the festival also indicates the prominent role given to Apollo and Diana in the Augustan celebration.

³²On the significance of the move of Vesta to the Palatine, see Beard, North, and Price 1998, 189–91.

Roman identity, Egypt was marked as non-Roman, while Greece could now be seen as Roman.

Several conclusions might be drawn from the fact that the boundaries of Romanness were redrawn in this fashion. For one, the acceptance of Apollo as Roman may serve as a signal of the full integration of Greek cultural elements into Rome. In the second century, as Rome coped with a massive influx of Greek culture in the wake of her victories in the Greek East, different elements of Greek culture were subjected to very public displays that designated them as non-Roman. For example, Suetonius (*Rhet.* 1.2) reports that in 161, a senatorial decree had authorized the praetor to expel Greek philosophers and rhetors from the city of Rome, and a similar expulsion of Epicurean philosophers occurred most likely in 154 (Ath. 12.547a; Ael., *VH* 9.12a). In the religious sphere, the repressive measures taken in 186 regarding the worship of Bacchus certainly underlined the non-Roman nature of that style of worship, whatever other messages may also have been communicated.³³ As the century progressed, however, Greek cultural elements found themselves increasingly a part of Roman culture; for example, Erich Gruen (1990, 190–92) has suggested that the censors in 92 criticized *Latin* rhetors for tampering with Greek rhetorical education. Octavian's emphasis on the Greek elements of Apollo's character and the location of Apollo's temple inside the *pomerium*, along with the widespread use of Greek artistic motifs on Augustan building projects, indicate the disappearance of the boundary between Greek and Roman. The emperor no longer felt it necessary to define Roman culture against Greek culture but rather accepted the latter as a valued part of the former.

Octavian's concern also extended to the relationship of the municipalities of Italy to Rome. Ronald Syme (1939) noted long ago that one of the main accomplishments of the Augustan regime was to further the integration of the Italian municipalities into the Roman state.³⁴ Just as Octavian allowed Greek culture to penetrate the boundaries of Romanness, his religious activity made those boundaries more permeable to the Italian municipalities as well. As demonstrated by many scholars in the collection *Hellenismus in Mittelitalien* (Zanker 1976), many of these

³³The bibliography on the Bacchanalia is vast. To begin, see Pailler 1988; Gruen 1990, 34–78.

³⁴See the recent remarks of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill 2000, 292, on Syme's opus: "We can take as read by now that the Augustan Age represents the culmination of a long process of the gradual incorporation of the communities of Italy into the central systems of Roman power. . . ."

towns had long since included Greek cultural elements as part of their communities, so the broader acceptance of Greek culture at Rome served to lessen remaining distinctions between Rome and these communities.

In addition, the *princeps* sponsored a number of building projects involving religious sites outside of Rome that complemented the extensive restoration program in the city itself and that demonstrate his concern for the integration of Italy: the transformation of the *lucus Feroniae*, an ancient Italic cult site, into a more elaborate complex; the granting of Roman colony status to a sanctuary of Fortuna in Umbria; the confirmation of privileges and a grant of autonomy to the sanctuary of Diana Tifatina in Campania; and the foundation of a colony at Hispellum in Umbria with the specific responsibility of overseeing the nearby sanctuary of Clitumnus. John Scheid (2005) has suggested that these actions were designed to show that not only Rome but also Italy received material benefits from the Augustan program of restoration, but the symbolic value of these actions may be equally as important. The respect shown by Octavian for these important Italian sanctuaries parallels that afforded to Roman sanctuaries; in effect, the Italian sanctuaries were treated as Roman.³⁵ In so doing, Octavian again demonstrated the alteration in the boundaries of Romanness, in this case allowing for a fuller participation by the people who had fought a desperate civil war against Rome only sixty years earlier. What was formerly just Italian was now Roman as well.

In the invention of a new significance for the *pomerium*, therefore, Octavian simultaneously expanded the boundaries of Romanness and redrew those boundaries clearly in order to maintain a distinct sense of Roman identity. Egyptian rites and Egyptian culture were welcomed at Rome but clearly marked as exotic, enabling a clearer definition of Roman identity, one that included Italy within its bounds.³⁶ The early

³⁵ Other examples of the parallel treatment of Italy and Rome include the reorganization of Rome into fourteen *regiones* and Italy into eleven administrative districts, and the spread of the Lares Augusti throughout Rome and the Augustales throughout Italy. Ostrow 1990 provides the best treatment of the Augustales and explicitly compares developments in Rome with those in Italy. Cf. also Duthoy 1978.

³⁶ In suggesting that Octavian's actions in regard to the *pomerium* reveal his concern with redrawing the boundaries of Romanness, I am not suggesting that a new Roman identity suddenly came into existence or that Italians suddenly thought of themselves as Romans. Few residents of Italy, or even of Rome, would be sufficiently attuned to the niceties of the *pomerium* to understand its new significance, and local identities clearly remained important throughout the Roman Empire. Rather, these actions are significant for understanding the emperor's approach to his relationship with the traditional Roman aristocracy. Those who would have been most aware of what Octavian had done were the members of the Roman upper classes and to a lesser extent the Italian upper classes, and especially those

date of this effort to redefine Roman identity, even before the victor adopted the name “Augustus” or had worked out how to centralize power without offending Republican sensibilities, underscores its importance to the new emperor. The year 28, which marked the beginning of the Augustan program to restore eighty-two temples in the city of Rome, stands out as a pivotal year in this process, for it saw several other actions that together began to redraw the boundaries of Romanness.³⁷ That this effort to redefine Romanness began at this early date should in fact not occasion surprise, for it is becoming increasingly clear, as Fergus Millar (2000) noted, that the blueprint for many of the important Augustan reforms were already laid during the period from 36–28 and especially in the three years following the battle of Actium. The Augustan poets may already have been contributing in no small fashion to this discourse about Roman identity, for the *Georgics*, with their *laudes Italiae*, were published in this same period, most likely in 29 on Octavian’s return to Rome after Actium. The use of the *pomerium* to differentiate Roman from non-Roman religious rites outlined here is therefore but one piece of the model established by Octavian for the incorporation of outside communities and the redefinition of Roman identity, a model that would set the tone for relations between Rome and the provinces for the *longue durée* of the Empire.^{38, 39}

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Romans whose families had served in the religious colleges of Rome. Through his actions, Octavian signaled to this key constituency his determination to treat Italy as fully Roman and so to complete the process of integration begun a century earlier. On Italian identity during the empire, see Giardina 1997; on issues of identity during in the Roman Empire more broadly, see Woolf 1998 and the collections edited by Laurence and Berry 1998 and Keay and Terrenato 2001.

³⁷On the restoration of the eighty-two temples and its connection to the reconstruction of Roman identity, see Orlin 2007.

³⁸This article originated at the *Redrawing the Boundaries* conference held at Yale University; I wish to thank Judy Barringer and Corinne Pache for their hospitality, as well as Susanna Morton Braund for comments during the discussion. The author is also grateful to Wolfgang Liebeschuetz for conversations at the *Augustan Rome, Egypt and the Near East* conference at Aberystwyth, and to the anonymous reviewers of *AJP* who pointed out various ways to make the article more effective. Naturally I take full responsibility for the final version.

³⁹This article is dedicated to Erich Gruen on the occasion of his retirement from Berkeley. His generosity of time, learning, and friendship has made it possible for me to be where I am today, and he has set a standard to which I can only aspire.

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